



PRESS RELEASE

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CHRIS ELWELL AND JACKIE ELEY TO STEP DOWN AS DIRECTOR AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF HALF MOON THEATRE AFTER 20 YEARS

After a pioneering 20 years of leading Half Moon Theatre in East London together, Chris Elwell and Jackie Eley have announced that they will step down as Director/CEO and Administrative Director at the end of January 2025.

During their tenure at Half Moon, the company has become a powerhouse of award-winning theatre for young audiences, alongside an extensive creative learning programme, rooted in the local community, that reaches 50,000 annually and engages those who are often excluded from arts activity.

Championing diversity and inclusion has been at the heart of all the activities during Chris and Jackie's time at Half Moon. They have both been advocates of countless artists and have developed strong and strategic collaborations within Half Moon's home borough of Tower Hamlets and across the UK, creating and presenting stories that reflect the UK's many varied and diverse communities and supporting under-represented artists in developing their practice.

Dedicated to celebrating and preserving the history and legacy of Half Moon, Chris and Jackie drove the *Stages of Half Moon* heritage project to research, explore and present the story of the company since its inception in 1972, across three venues, with over 200 productions, 60 participation projects and 100 filmed interviews with Half Moon alumni. It is a living project that continues today as an important record of theatre history and the artists and creatives who work in the industry.

Chris joined the company in 1997 and quickly secured core funding from Arts Council England, opening the building as a public venue in 1998, with the participatory programmes and professional theatre work informing each other and having equal status.

During his 27 years at Half Moon, Chris has been a champion of professional work for young audiences and artform development, including the sector significant programmes *Exchange for Change* and *Narratives of Empathy and Resilience*. At Half Moon Chris has directed, written and adapted over 60 pieces of work, many award-winning, for audiences of all ages, from babies to teenagers.

Digital innovation under Chris' leadership has enabled Half Moon to develop its On Demand streaming service of theatre for young audiences, allowing families to access award-winning work, recorded live at Half Moon, from the comfort of their homes. The platform emerged from the unprecedented challenges of the Covid pandemic and has expanded Half Moon's reach far beyond the East End of London, making work more accessible to audiences than ever before.

Chris was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to theatre and young people in the 2017 Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Jackie has been with Half Moon since 2004 and has been instrumental in securing the future of the company by prioritising access, innovation and environmental sustainability. She has spearheaded major capital campaigns of almost £2m to buy and refurbish Half Moon's beautiful Victorian venue. Thanks to Jackie it is now a fully accessible young-person-friendly destination for audiences, participants and artists to enjoy.

Passionate about removing barriers to accessing theatre, Jackie led the launch of Theatre Passport as part of Half Moon's 30th birthday celebrations in 2020. This free ticket scheme for Tower Hamlets school and community groups gives children the opportunity to experience the magic of live theatre, many for the first time, and start them on their creative journey.

Commenting on their departure, Chris and Jackie said: “It has been an absolute honour to lead Half Moon. Leaving the theatre company after more than 20 years is a bittersweet moment filled with immense pride. For two decades, it has been our absolute pleasure and privilege to nurture a community where young people, artists and theatre-makers can thrive through the transformative power of theatre. The influence of live theatre is more than just performance; it's about building a community, fostering creativity and instilling confidence. It has been a pleasure to cultivate a synergy between performance and participation. The importance of providing a space for young talent to express themselves and explore their passions cannot be overstated. Theatre helps boost self-esteem, enhance communication skills and create lasting connections. We are both enormously proud to be a part of the diverse, flourishing, creative hub that is Half Moon. The legacy of this theatre company will continue to inspire and empower future generations.”

Chair of Half Moon, Ben Jones said: “Chris and Jackie have led Half Moon with exemplary care, innovation and ingenuity for over two decades. Their passion for removing barriers to accessing theatre, championing and developing work for young audiences and supporting under-represented artists in developing their practice, has been at the heart of everything they have achieved. Chris and Jackie have ensured the voices of young people are an integral part of the organisation. They have created a forward-thinking programme of distinctive, thought-provoking work that has taken Half Moon on a hugely successful journey of innovation, new writing and artform development - both at our base in Limehouse, East London, but also with partnerships with theatres, artists, and organisations across Tower Hamlets and the UK. Chris and Jackie’s many devoted years of service to Half Moon have put them at the forefront of theatre for young audiences and UK theatre. The Board joins me in thanking them for everything they have done as leaders of the company and we offer them our most sincere admiration and gratitude.”

A recruitment campaign to find successors to Chris and Jackie will begin shortly, with appointments expected in the autumn.

ENDS

For further information or to arrange interviews please contact Stephen Beeny on 020 7709 8907 or stephen@halfmoon.org.uk

Images of Chris, Jackie and Half Moon Theatre are available at the Dropbox link below.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/i6sgm01qlx0lxzv4qv0ba/ANcjEZwLteokmLWNLeXBqx8?rlkey=yrtzr2hw5k8fv9jlt0r930mlp&st=rp2uonmz&dl=0>

ABOUT HALF MOON

Half Moon is the UK’s leading small-scale young people’s venue and touring company. It is a local organisation with a national remit, committed to supporting artists and young people at every stage of their creative development. Working from our base in East London, we specialise in new writing and artform development, acting as a gateway organisation that provides pathways for progression and experimentation. Our wide-ranging programme reaches around 50,000 annually and engages those who are often excluded from arts activity. Our activity includes a season of professional plays for young audiences, national touring productions and an extensive creative learning programme, including eight youth theatres.

Half Moon is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England and receives regular funding from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Half Moon’s digital archive is available at stagesofhalfmoon.org.uk

Website: www.halfmoon.org.uk

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